

Testimony of Pamela Nordstrom, RN, Gentiva Health Services

To the Public Health Committee

Regarding HB 6844

An Act Concerning Patients of Home Healthcare Agencies

Wednesday, February 21, 2007

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee thank you for this opportunity to address you today in support of **House Bill No 6844: An Act Concerning Patients of Home Health Agencies**. This is a very important piece of legislation.

As you are aware, a large number of mentally ill people receive homecare services from home health agencies in Connecticut. Reimbursement for these services has come to represent a substantial portion of these agencies annual revenue. It has also become a very important source of income for many homecare nurses working in this specialty. Sadly, this relationship between agency revenue and nurses' income has only served to bring out the ugly side of our business.

This occurs when, for one reason or another a nurse decides to change the agency they work for. Disgruntled nurses leaving one agency bring "their patients" from one agency to another and do so without obtaining the permission or consent of the patients they serve.

Most often, the source of the disgruntlement is nothing more than an attempt by the nurse's current employer to raise standards of care or documentation. In the process of leaving an agency these nurses shop from agency to agency to see who will make them the best offer, bargaining with the caseloads of patients they can bring with them. Because of the revenue attached to these patients, this activity has not been discouraged by many homecare agencies, and some still engage in the practice of luring nurses away from competing agencies with promises of increased income or decreased paperwork, etc. This activity has a number of serious consequences:

- Nurses manage the transfer of their patients using such tactics as, saying to their patient, "I am moving to agency A and you are coming with me". There is no effort made to let the patient choose who his/her healthcare provider will be.
- Often the loss of revenue associated with these moves leads to the lay-off of administrative and office staff that depend on this work for their livelihood.
- As a result of this activity it is very difficult to raise standards of care and manage our business in an ethical and efficient manner.
- The desire to maximize revenue by the agencies and income by the nurses has created extremely aggressive inter-agency competition to hire nurses with caseloads of patients, resulting in increased wage and administrative costs.

It should be remembered that there is no need for this behavior because when nurses leave an agency the continuity of the patients care is never in doubt – the patient continues to receive care at the level they are accustomed to.

My intent in supporting this legislation is:

1. To formally recognize that the patient is the client of the home health agency and not the individual nurse
2. The patient alone has the right to choose his/her healthcare provider
3. To ensure that nurses and home care agencies who have a financial interest in these services do not unduly influence or direct the patients decision
4. To ensure that individual nurses terminate their relationship with the patients being served by their agency of employment when they terminate employment with that agency

I believe it is our task as clinicians to enhance and optimize the patients' independence and to be strong advocates for their rights. It is not our right to journey from agency to agency treating patients as if they are somehow indentured to the nurse. As professionals I believe it is our duty to act responsibly toward our patients, our profession and our employers. Behavior such as this undermines the care of our patients, the principles of our profession and our responsibility to employers and colleagues. It tarnishes the image of the great nurses and agencies that do outstanding work in this area every day and threatens the livelihood of many more people that depend on it. Above all it compromises the basic rights of the patients we serve.

I believe that this piece of legislation will go a long way to correcting a great wrong and I ask you to support its passage through this Legislature. Thank you for considering this very important piece of legislation.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully yours,

Pamela Nordstrom RN
Manager of Clinical Practice
Gentiva Health Services
30 Stanford Drive
Farmington, CT 06032
Tel: 860-674-1302